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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: U.S. ARMS SALES TO TAIWAN

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese-language dailies focused news coverage October 4-6 on the U.S. financial bailout bill, which U.S. President George W. Bush signed into law Friday; on the approved U.S. arms sales to Taiwan; and on the probe into the alleged money-laundering case involving former President Chen Shui-bian. The centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" front-paged a banner headline Sunday reading "The Largest-scale Ever and Worth over NT\$200 billion; Taiwan Receives Five Arms Sales Items from the United States, Both Offensive and Defensive [Weapons] Combined." The paper also ran a banner headline on page five the same day reading "Arms Sales to Taiwan: Submarines Have Long Been Out, Black Hawk [Utility Helicopters] to Be Decided by New U.S. President."

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an op-ed in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" said Washington tossed off a reduced arms sales package based on its own political concerns. A separate "Liberty Times" op-ed criticized the Ma Ying-jeou Administration's swinging strategy, saying it has made Taiwan lose all its bargaining chips in the arms procurements. A "Liberty Times" op-ed, however, alerted that the approved arms sales items indicate that the United States is ready to let Taiwan go its own way in the event of crisis in the Taiwan Strait. A "China Times" editorial, by contrast, said the fact that Washington is willing to offend Beijing for the arms sales showed that the essence of U.S.-Taiwan relations remain intact. An analysis in the pro-unification "United Daily News" alerted the Ma Administration to attach equal importance to cross-Strait relations and its relations with the United States, as the arms sales "indicate undercurrents in Taipei-Washington relations". An editorial in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" said "as encouraging as the news is, the State Department's decision is more than likely to have been motivated by limiting damage with China rather than optimizing Taiwan's ability to defend itself." An editorial in the pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" called the U.S.-Taiwan arms deal a "warning, not a gift." End summary.

A) "Out of Political Concerns, the United States Tosses off Abridged Arms Sales Package"

Washington correspondent Nadia Tsao wrote in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 700,000] (10/5):

"The U.S. State Department has eventually notified to Congress its arms sales items worth of US\$6.4 billion. The move could make the Ma Administration, which is pressured both inside and out, feel a sense of relief for the time being; it has not only eliminated the doubts about U.S. 'freezing' arms sales to Taiwan but has also helped to justify to the Taiwan people that Washington has no intention to be absent from the Ma Administration's efforts to create a strategic climate of thawing cross-Strait relations. But the Bush Administration's decision to toss off an abridged version of U.S. arms sales package based on its own political concerns rather than pure consideration of Taiwan's defense needs may not necessarily sound like good news for Taiwan in the long run.

"The Ma Administration's approval ratings in Taiwan have kept on

dropping. But judging from the reactions of Beijing and Washington, even though Taipei has failed to get all the weapon items it wants, both the United States and China are still willing to toss off some of their bargaining chips on the table and keep playing the game with the Ma Administration. ..."

B) "Ma's Strategy Swinging; Taiwan Has Lost All Its Bargaining Chips"

Journalist Peng Hsien-chun wrote in an analysis in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 700,000] (10/5):

"... Even though the [U.S.] arms deals have been settled and [Taipei's] apprehension has thus been removed, it remains a reality that Washington has 'made things difficult' for the Ma Administration. The Ma Administration has been swaying and hesitating between the United States and China, making people wonder whether it wants to go 'left' or 'right.' [The Ma Administration's] ambiguous strategy is, without a doubt, the basic reason why there have been ripples in Washington-Taipei ties. Washington's approval of the arms sales was more of a symbolic move than a substantive one. It showed that the Ma Administration, which is eager to tilt toward China and improve cross-Straits relations, had better not exercise wishful thinking and thus exclude itself from the established order dominated by the international powers. Even though the balance between international powers is changing rapidly, Taiwan remains a weak pawn [in the international community]. ..."

C) "The Arms Sales Crisis as Viewed from William Murray's Study"

Lai I-chung, former director of DPP's International Affairs Department, opined in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 700,000] (10/6):

"... A close comparison between the approved arms sales items and a recent document regarding the U.S. strategy towards Taiwan indicate that the arms sales do not result in an advancement of the U.S. commitment to Taiwan; instead, they appear to be an omen showing that Washington is ready to let Taiwan go its own way in the event of crisis in the Taiwan Strait. ... The 'Nelson Report' released on October 1 pointed out that both the U.S. and Taiwan national security authorities have paid close attention to an article, entitled 'Revisiting Taiwan's Defense Strategy,' written by William Murray and published in the "US Naval War College Review" in July. The arms sales items approved this time were more or less consistent with what was suggested in Murray's article. ...

"As a matter of fact, Murray's suggestions had nothing to do with how Taiwan should defend itself; they were more like suggesting how the United States could leave Taiwan alone [in the event of cross-Straits tension]. ... The KMT has tried everything it could to block the arms procurements over the last eight years, resulting in a military imbalance in the Taiwan Strait, so this is the chief culprit that has caused [Murray's suggestions]. But the suggested hands-off strategy as implied in [Murray's article] seemed to be proved in the arms sales this time. The [U.S.] signal sent via its arms sales is worrisome as to whether Washington will see giving up Taiwan as one of its options."

D) "U.S.-China-Taiwan Relations in the Wake of Approved Arms Procurements"

The centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 220,000] editorialized (10/6):

"... In any rate, the fact that the arms procurements have passed has in itself rebutted many previous arguments about the issue. What one really should pay attention to is: Where are future Washington-Beijing-Taipei ties headed? First, judging from Taiwan's interests and position, while the cross-Straits relations are thawing, Taiwan still needs to maintain a robust defense, including upgrading the capabilities of its weapons, strengthening the joint-defensive relations with its allies, self-developing weapons and buying weapons from other countries. Also, military cooperation with other allies and observation of their military exercises must keep on as planned.

"To put it in a more concretely, military cooperation, including arms procurements, should be bilateral matters between Taiwan and the United States, which should not and need not be discussed by both sides of the Taiwan Strait. By the same token, we also hope that Washington will not discuss with Beijing its arms sales to Taiwan and will simply use its security commitment to Taiwan as specified in the Taiwan Relations Act as its guideline. After all, only when Beijing is really willing to reduce its military threats toward Taiwan and when both sides enter [the stage of] talks over a cease-fire agreement and confidence-building measures should [the issue of] arms sales possibly be laid on the table.

"Second, the fact that Washington is willing to offend Beijing over arms procurements this time indicates that the essence of Taiwan-U.S. relations remain unchanged. The move has also re-identified the reality in international politics -- namely, the United States' original hope and intention that both sides of the Taiwan Strait would stay separate politically have remained intact, and Taiwan's armaments will be its bargaining chips and capital when it talks with Beijing. The United States does not want Taiwan to develop or obtain 'offensive' weapons, so it left out submarines and called for a halt to the mid-range surface-to-surface missiles, as 'defensive' weapons will help to maintain both sides politically separate. ...."

E) "United States' Dealing a Head Blow [to Taiwan Indicates] Undercurrents beneath U.S.-Taiwan Relations"

Journalist Stella Wang wrote in an analysis in the pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] (10/5):

"... In the face of its internal economic predicament and pressure from mainland China, the United States agreed to sell those less complicated weapon items [to Taiwan]. It is able to keep its commitment specified in the Taiwan Relations Act on the one hand, and it will not offend Beijing on the other. Washington can make a huge amount of money and also keep an upper hand in manipulating the strategic triangle among Washington, Beijing and Taipei. Yet the United States has chosen to notify Congress on the last day of Congress' extended session; the apparent reason was that the matter had been under inter-departmental screening, but in reality, it was Washington's intention to deal a head blow to the Ma Administration, as Taiwan had long since issued a letter of request and Washington should have reviewed it a long time ago. ...

"The Ma Administration must be vigilant and be aware that cross-Strait relations are of equal importance to its relations with the United States; it should not allow any unexpected mistake or accident in the way it handles the matter. Part of the arms procurements proposal has been approved, and the Ma Administration should not spend too much time feeling happy about it. The Ma Administration should start proactively to construct friendly relations and mutual trust with the Democratic and Republican Parties. No matter who comes into power in the United States in 2009, Taipei-Washington relations must enter a new period of stability."

F) "The End of the Freeze"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (10/4):

"It has been an epic display of brinkmanship. The U.S. State Department, after perhaps a year of holding up processes that would have delivered promised arms to Taiwan, has relented and will reactivate the deals prior to the U.S. presidential election, possibly allowing delivery to be approved by Congress before the current session ends. ... The importance of the effort to unfreeze the arms deal cannot be understated as far as US foreign policy is concerned. As a number of analysts have suggested, leaving the problem to next year would have left both a Republican and Democratic president with an unnecessary burden. Starting a term as U.S. president by releasing arms to Taiwan would be far more damaging to U.S.-China ties than releasing them in the dying days of the current presidential term.

"The release of arms also lets the next president craft a China policy relatively unsullied by the ham-fisted behavior of everyone

involved in recent years. As encouraging as the news is, the State Department's decision is more than likely to have been motivated by limiting damage with China rather than optimizing Taiwan's ability to defend itself. In this respect, Taiwan continues to fall behind, and rapidly so, not just in terms of arms procurements and combat readiness but also in terms of the ideological hollowness of Taiwan's government, the political exhaustion of ordinary people and President Ma Ying-jeou's refusal in rhetorical and practical terms to treat Taiwan as a genuine polity and Taiwanese people as his compatriots and masters. ... In the near future, however, it is hoped that the State Department, which has so much influence over policy and its implementation, can play a more constructive and supportive role in US-Taiwan relations than it has done under the Bush administration."

G) "U.S.-Taiwan Arms Deal Is Warning, Not Gift"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (10/6):

"... The long-term delay of this sale and the uncertainty it produced regarding the state of U.S.-Taiwan relations and the reliability of Washington's commitment to fulfill the requirements of the Taiwan Relations Act has already damaged both the morale of the Taiwan people and the quality of Taiwan's national security that cannot be early swept away by Bush's belated decision. Moreover, the package was only about half of the originally proposed US\$12 billion deal and did not include important defensive weapon systems that Taiwan had previously proposed, including diesel-electric submarines, which Washington had already approved, and UH-60 'Black Hawk' helicopters.

"Even more unfortunate, Washington did not include advanced F-16 C/D Falcon jet fighters in the package, a decision that will make it difficult for Taiwan to maintain a balance in air defense in the Taiwan Strait in the face of the rapid modernization of the PRC air force, which is being equipped with fourth-generation Sukhoi-30 and Sukhoi-27 jet fighters far superior to Taiwan's current mix of F-16s, Mirage 2000Es and IDF indigenous defense fighters. Instead of unreservedly welcoming this decision, as did Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we believe the Taiwan government should take the failure to secure F-16 C/Ds as a grave warning of the failure of the restored Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) government of President Ma Ying-jeou to rebuild a relationship of mutual trust and respect with Washington. ... Indeed, the Ma government should carefully take the inability to secure F-16 C/Ds and the halving of the package as a grave warning to re-evaluate the implications and reconsider the content of its current policies of 'placing cross-strait relations above diplomacy' and 'neglecting national defense to curry favor with China.' ..."

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